

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Hanging T Ranch Habitat Restoration Project – Phase 1

Project No.: 2010-072-00

Project Manager: Eric Leitzinger, EWM-4

Location: Custer and Lemhi Counties, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) along with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery fund proposes to fund the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to implement a restoration project along the Pahsimeroi River to increase instream habitat complexity and riparian function. The proposed project would restore juvenile rearing and over-wintering habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

Proposed activities would be the first phase (Phase 1) of a multi-year effort to restore habitat along approximately four miles of the Pahsimeroi River. Phase 1 would occur along a 0.6-mile-long stretch of the river. Sulphur Creek converges with the Pahsimeroi in the project area and proposed actions would also occur over approximately 0.2 miles of Sulphur Creek from the confluence. Restoration actions would include re-meandering sections of the Pahsimeroi River, filling in abandoned sections, installing instream habitat structures, and constructing beaver dam analogs (BDAs) and engineered riffles in strategic locations.

Depending on site conditions, herbicide treatments for invasive plants would be applied a few weeks prior to any ground disturbance to prevent distribution of invasive species during construction. About 3,000 cubic yards of material would be excavated in the floodplain and main channel to create meanders. Channel fill, using excavated materials, would be used to fill the abandoned sections of the channel between meanders. About 75 single logs and whole trees with rootwads would be used to create instream habitat structures that would be placed throughout the channel. Logs would be buried into banks or placed on the surface and anchored between trees.

Approximately 30 BDAs would be constructed across the channel (main channel and Sulphur Creek) to increase depth and slow flow velocity. BDAs would be constructed by placing riffle material on the channel bed with willow rootballs placed on top. A log would be placed into an excavated trench on each bank, extending into the channel. The logs would be angled toward each other, forming a wide V-shaped structure that would anchor the willow rootballs. The length of the logs would overlap across the width of the channel, but there would be a gap between them to allow for fish passage during low flow. Slash woody material would be woven between the

rootballs and streambed material would be added at the front and back of the structure. Live willow stakes and slash woody material would be placed in the excavated bank trenches before backfilling the trenches and topping the bank slopes with riffle material.

In 10 locations across the project reach, including Sulphur Creek, BDAs would be constructed in a series to span the channel and floodplain, ranging in size from about 70 to 500 feet long, totaling about 2,000 linear feet of floodplain BDAs. BDA construction would be similar to channel BDAs except logs would be buried into banks or existing ground across the floodplain. Wood material would extend about 2 feet above ground level and be planted with willow stakes. There would be breaks in the length of each BDA to accommodate flows. Brush bank treatments would curve around the ends of the BDA at each break. Brush bank treatments would consist of live willow stakes, tops angled toward the water, buried in a mud slurry and covered with slash material.

Nine riffles would be constructed using imported materials (approximately 900 cubic yards) in the channel, in high flow areas across the floodplain, and in the breaks of the floodplain BDAs. The project would construct another, larger riffle at the downstream end of the project to provide grade control and improve the existing ford at that location.

The project would install a variety of vegetation structures along banks to provide stability, including brush bank treatments and willow stakes. Maximum bank excavation would be 8 feet deep for incorporation of wood and vegetation structures before being backfilled. Approximately 7,000 feet of jack-rail fence would be installed to exclude cattle from the floodplain.

Two equipment and material staging areas (approximately 1 acre each) would be established to support Phase 1. Access routes would be on existing farm roads or temporary access routes (approximately 2.5 miles) created for construction. Two existing culverts on ranch roads would be improved to accommodate construction vehicles. Temporary access routes would not require any road construction but would be created by clearing vegetation and driving on existing ground. Two temporary bridges would be installed for stream crossings during construction and may require abutments on each end that would be partially buried (up to 4 feet deep) on the banks. Depending on site conditions at the time of construction, an additional temporary bridge and four culverts may be installed to serve as temporary stream crossings. Otherwise, access routes going through saturated ground would be temporarily covered with stabilization measures, such as timber mats. Erosion controls and work area isolation would be implemented according to the approved plans. Stranded aquatic organisms would be captured and moved out of isolated work areas prior to dewatering

Disturbed areas not intended for use in future phases would be decompacted (up to 8 inches) and seeded with native seed mixes and mulched after construction. Wetland and riparian areas would also be planted with 1-gallon native plants and live stakes. Protective fencing may be installed around plants to protect them from deer and elk browsing. Equipment to be used includes bulldozers, excavators, loaders, and a variety of service vehicles.

In-water work would occur during the in-water work period (July 1 – August 21). Work outside the channel may take place before or after. Planting would take place after all construction has been completed, later in the fall, and the following spring.

The site would be monitored for several years after construction is complete. If failures in system function, structure function, and integrity occur; or if there are increased risks to infrastructure, riverscape processes, or fish passage, the project's adaptive management procedures would be implemented. These procedures may include installation of new structures of the same type originally installed, modification of structures, additional bank stabilization, or channel fill or

excavation. Adaptive management procedures (replanting, reseeding) may also be implemented if the native plant community is slow to establish or there is low survival in restored areas. If needed, additional herbicide applications would be applied in subsequent years if monitoring shows encroachment by invasive species.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion. These actions also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 *et seq.*).

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996; 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures*, BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

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Project Site Description

The headwaters of the Pahsimeroi River are in Custer County, Idaho. The river flows between two mountain ranges before joining the Salmon River near Ellis, Idaho. Elevations along the valley floor of the Pahsimeroi are around 4,500 feet. Sagebrush grassland is widespread along the valley floor. The proposed project site is on private land about 12 miles southeast of Ellis, Idaho, that is currently used for cattle grazing. This portion of the Pahsimeroi is heavily influenced by groundwater gains from the local aquifer. Historically, the river in the project area was a multi-threaded, highly sinuous channel with multiple side channels, including spring-fed channels, with an active floodplain and robust riparian vegetation. However, alterations to the river system, including irrigation water diversions, beaver management, riparian clearing, livestock grazing, and channel alterations, have drastically changed the system into a single-threaded channel with poor floodplain connection, eroding banks, and limited riparian vegetation. Irrigation withdrawals can result in limited to no flow, limiting aquatic habitat and access for ESA-listed and resident fish while also reducing the stream power available to create and maintain habitat features.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On March 4, 2026, BPA sent a letter to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with a summary of efforts made to identify historic properties. A cultural resource survey identified a site eligible for the National Register of Historic Places within the project area. This site would be avoided during construction; therefore, BPA determined that the project would have no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Cultural Resources Project No.: ID 2024 085). On March 19, 2026, BPA received concurrence from SHPO. No responses were received from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation.

Notes:

- An avoidance area has been added to design plans. IDFG shall ensure temporary fencing is installed around the avoidance area prior to construction.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary impacts to geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from the operation of heavy equipment to excavate soils to create meanders, install wood structures anchored into stream banks and the floodplain, and plant vegetation structures along banks. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for instream turbidity or

excessive runoff during construction. Work areas would be contoured to match the surrounding grade following construction and seeded with native, riparian plant species to facilitate soil recovery. The vegetation structures would also provide stream bank stability and limit erosion over the long term. Impacts to biological components of soils from pre-construction herbicide application would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and compliance with the conservation measures in BPA's Fish and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program ESA Section 7 programmatic consultations (HIP BiOps).

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed species or state special-status plants are known to be present in the project area. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation including crushing and removal by heavy equipment, excavation, and trampling from work crews. Impacts would be minimized by using existing access routes and planting native vegetation and seeding disturbed areas after construction to help reestablish native plant communities. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances would occur as part of herbicide application but would have short-term effects. Impacts of herbicide applications would be minimized by implementation of proposed actions according to BPA's HIP BiOps. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from removal of competitive invasive plants, allowing native plant communities to establish themselves after construction.

4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project site. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPaC lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There are no critical habitats for ESA-listed or proposed species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Due to current agricultural land use practices and lack of native vegetation, it is highly unlikely these species would be present. Therefore, there would be no impact to ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species from the project.

IPaC information indicates that it would be unlikely for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) to be present in or near the project area during the time of year when proposed activities would occur. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for either species in the project area. If a nest is observed in the project area, IDFG would employ protection measures (e.g., timing, distance) as necessary to ensure eagles would not be harmed as a result of the project. Bald and golden eagles could benefit from the project in the long-term from an increased source of food coming from improved fish and wildlife habitats in the area. Therefore, the project would have no adverse impacts to bald and golden eagles.

No wildlife habitat would be modified to a degree that would permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from construction activities and human presence. Herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following the conservation measures in BPA's HIP BiOps, such as not applying herbicides during migratory bird nesting season and minimizing overspray and drifting. In the long term, the project would re-establish native, riparian vegetation that would provide more habitat for wildlife than exists now.

5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout are found in the project area. No state special-status species occupy the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's HIP BiOps and would adhere to all applicable conservation measures, including turbidity monitoring requirements, approved work timing, and work area isolation. Excavation for the meanders and installing wood and vegetation structures would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by mechanical activities, but quick re-occupation of this site by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated. Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during and immediately after excavation activities. This increase would be limited to the time of construction, primarily during excavation, would not be expected to last more than several hours, and would be mitigated by the use of erosion control measures throughout project construction. Herbicide application may have effects for ESA-listed species in the project area. However, the project would follow BPA's HIP BiOps conservation measures to minimize impacts. No herbicide would be applied in-water. Herbicide application over larger areas would occur in upland areas only. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish by reducing fine sediment, improving flow rate and depth, increasing access to quality habitat, and providing more riparian cover. The project would obtain a required permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Section 401 water quality certification from Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification.

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, IDFG would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The USFWS National Wetlands Inventory identifies much of the floodplain in the project area as freshwater emergent or freshwater forested-shrub wetlands. By design, proposed actions would include excavation and discharge of materials below the ordinary high water mark and within wetlands in order to increase the duration and extent of the floodplain. Overall, about 3.5 acres of wetlands would be temporarily impacted by the project. The project would obtain a required permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Section 401 water quality certification from Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification. Minor and temporary wetland vegetation disturbances would occur as part of herbicide application but would have short-term effects. Impacts of herbicide applications would be minimized by implementation of proposed actions according to BPA's HIP BiOps. Restoration activities would support improved wetland and riparian structure and would not have adverse impacts to wetlands in the long term.

Notes:

- Prior to construction activities in wetlands, IDFG would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. There would be potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the heavy equipment used, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills and drips to be of sufficient quantity to contaminate groundwater. Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following BPA's HIP BiOps requirements.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor changes to the underlying land use (agriculture, cattle grazing). A portion of the project area, about 17 acres, would be fenced to exclude cattle, reverting the land back to more natural riparian and floodplain areas. Cattle would be temporarily excluded from some pastures in or around the project area during construction. Normal use would resume after construction is complete. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River. There are no public recreational opportunities in the project area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes would occur during project implementation. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Long-term changes resulting from creating sinuosity in the river, adding wood structures to the river and floodplain, and planting native vegetation are unlikely to be seen by anyone but the landowner and adjacent property owners working in nearby fields. Immediate changes to the visual landscape would be minor. Over time, the project would alter the landscape and visual character of this reach of the Pahsimeroi River by increasing vegetative cover along the creek and returning it to a more natural condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from exhaust and dust from vehicles and equipment and from herbicide applications. Herbicide effects would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label. Dust and emissions from vehicles and equipment would be similar to those occurring during normal agricultural operations in the area. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short-term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion. Noise from construction is not expected to exceed the typical noise from agricultural equipment operating in the area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Operating construction vehicles and equipment inherently carries potential safety risks to operators, however, staff training and implementing best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. Herbicide application poses a slight risk of skin and eye

irritations, cuts, and bruises. Herbicide applications would be by a licensed applicator who would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before transporting or applying any herbicides, thus making the risk from herbicides insignificant.

Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.

Explanation: N/A

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: N/A

Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

Explanation: N/A

Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.

Explanation: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: IDFG has a landowner agreement in place and has been coordinating with the private landowner during design of the project. IDFG would be in communication with the landowner regarding work timing before construction starts.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist